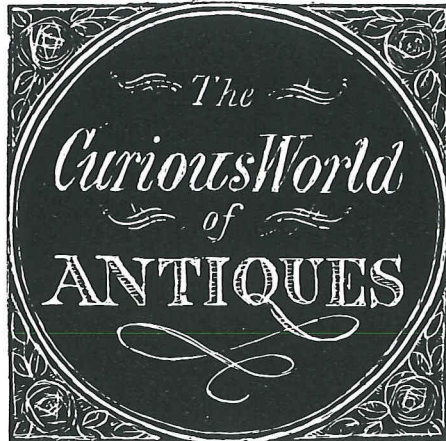
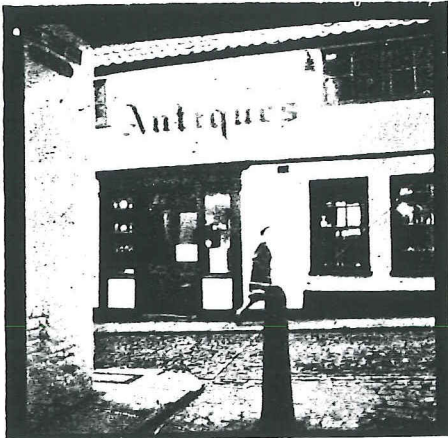


NORFOLK FAIR Sept 1967



COLLECTING PEWTER

by CHRISTOPHER A. PEAL

PEWTER! What is the picture in your mind's eye? Private tankards hanging up in the local? Horribly garish near-steel items in a glossy antique shop? Charles Dickens? A simple, battered link with the past? A medium where items prior to, say 1820, are far scarcer than their comparable styles in silver? From these, and many more visions, take your choice, and let us fill in the background.

A fascinating story spreads out in tracing the history of pewter. The Romans of the Republic knew, and used, lead. And they also knew tin, which was becoming scarce. In this country they found a wealth of tin in Cornwall, and apparently started to copy, in simpler form, the magnificent silver services which "the quality" could afford in the affluent society of the mid-occupation period. Somewhere along the line, in the third or fourth century, someone dropped some lead into the molten tin, perhaps fraudulently. Tin was crossed with lead and, as so often happens, the hybrid was stronger and more amenable. It was kinder to work, kinder in use. So, probably for economy, they pushed their luck harder—again and again—with very happy reports from the makers, and customers. That is, until one day someone died of lead poisoning, traced to eating off and scraping a dish containing more lead than tin.

BRITISH ORIGIN

The writer has personal knowledge of many, many pieces of Romano British pewter plate, which vary in tin content from 99.2% to 43%. They oscillated until a safe and satisfactory 80% was used. This standard,

approximately, was used throughout the 'teen centuries. Now this shows us that pewter originated in this country. Archaeologically, none as old is known outside this country unless it be in China, about which rumours are rife but knowledge nil (facts few). Manufacture is certain in Somerset, and there is a fifty per cent likelihood of East Anglian provenance too.

When the Romans left, a new pattern of highly disorganised local self-sufficiency developed immediately. Trade, and the roads, were abandoned. Pewter manufacture ceased, and for 500 to 700 years there is no record, written or artefact, of manufacture, until probably c. 1200—when pagan sentimentality and rites were perpetuated in grave goods of pewter. Chalices and patens were buried with dead monks, perhaps for the departed spirits' use, or as a suitable emblem to accompany the worn-out body in its grave—inexpensive copies of silver.

No doubt very many other items were made—but almost nothing remains. One magnificent piece, no doubt preserved by its use and location, is a Font Bowl, now in Norfolk in private and caring hands. This shows almost pure Anglo-Saxon decoration—carried out in the Anglo-Saxon "chip carving" technique—not the late medieval "wriggling." This must be of rural manufacture, of 12th—14th century.

GUILD FORMED

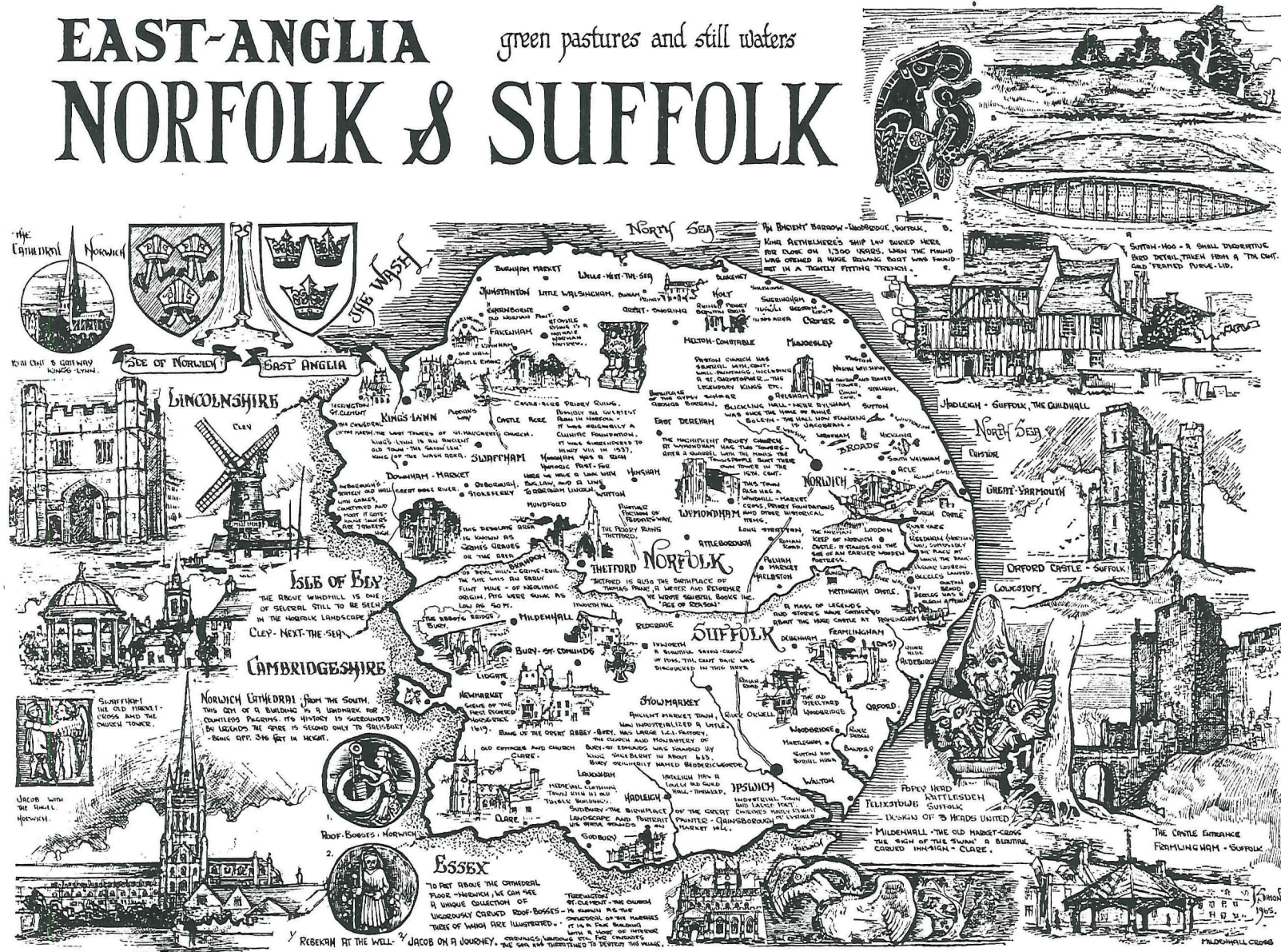
In common with other crafts in the mid-14th century the makers banded together for self-protection as a guild—the Worshipful Company of Pewterers. In the



● Set of pub measures, quarter gill to quart. George IV, William IV and Victoria.

EAST-ANGLIA NORFOLK & SUFFOLK

green pastures and still waters



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This miniature map is one of an exclusive series on "The Historical Counties of England," sized 16½" x 21½". Printed on hand-made parchment, with a gold border and with the Coat of Arms hand-painted in authentic colours, priced 21/- from the publishers of this magazine (address on page 3). Send 2/6 postal order for catalogue of the entire series.

simplest terms, they kept quality and price up, competition out. Through the centuries the Company strove to maintain authority, to keep its liverymen up to the mark, and to resist intrusions into their trade by journeymen and tinkers not being members of the Company, or by other media. Old pewter—more than 150 years old—is now very scarce indeed. Why should such a widely used material be so rare? You have only to look at old pewter, and handle it, to realise two of the reasons. It oxidises to a dull black-brown-grey scale which is not attractive: and it is very soft. Furthermore, the liverymen were not allowed to repair damaged pewter vessels. With such a low melting point, damage was very probable. Then again, styles changed rapidly—and finally, each time we have engaged in war scrap metal has been a necessity—possibly none more so than in the Napoleonic War. Here are no less than six reasons; any one of which would be a powerful factor, explaining its rarity. Add to these the enormous general spread in the last 15 years, nationally and internationally, of all classes of collecting, due to widespread affluence, the Jones next door, and literature on collecting.

One of the most attractive series in pewter—particularly for ladies—are the early, desperately scarce, spoons of c. 1450 to c. 1650, bearing knops, or heads, such as Diamond, Acorn, Seal, Horned Headdress, Maidenhead, Wrythen Ball and others. An interesting fact is that these delicate items, basically unsuited to pewter, have all been preserved by the chance of loss. They fell into drains, wells, river banks—and one could say that all extant now have been recovered from soil or mud. Plates, dishes and saucers had been made in large quantities, not only by the pewter men of London, but in some provincial cities and towns. Norwich and King's Lynn had their small groups of pewterers in the 16th and 17th centuries, a few pieces of the latter being in Norfolk churches and very few in private hands. The writer discovered that the top of a very rare and attractive salt-cellar found in the now dry Whittlesey Mere, was made at King's Lynn, and while writing is glancing at a fine late 17th century plate made in St. John's Maddermarket.

TANKARD CHARM

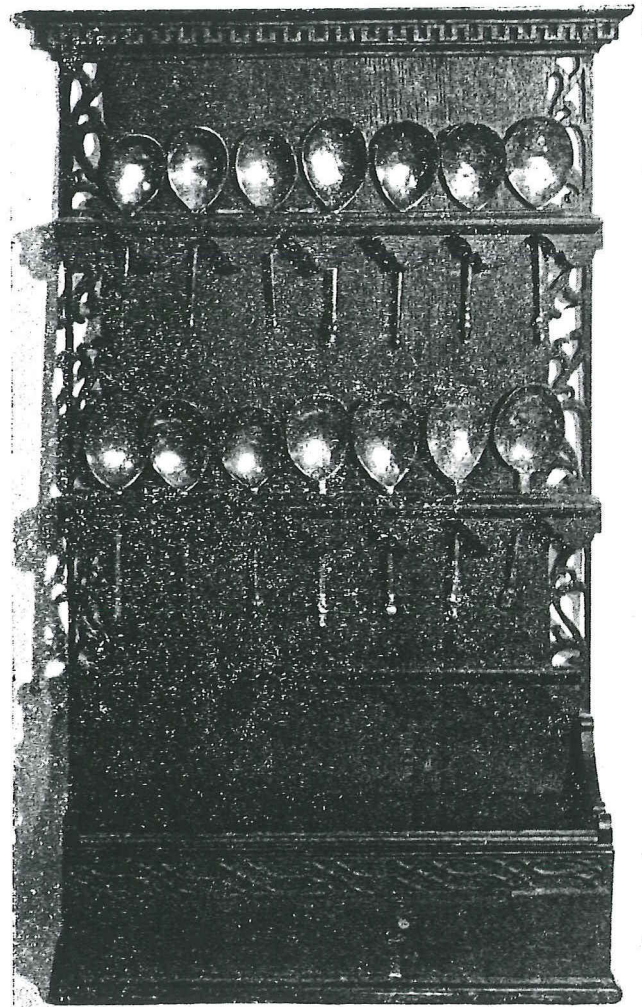
Perhaps more generally interesting are the beautiful candlesticks of the time. With the drip tray, one can easily visualise the flickering light being carried up twisting stairs, and along creaking passages. And what of the handsome and huge tankards—more usually lidded. Presumably the lids are a safeguard against loss in carousal and unsteady stance. The glamorous flat lids have an irresistible appeal—reflected in the high prices fetched under the hammer in the major sales rooms. Some of these, less rare, but more expensive, have elaborate decoration, which really flooded into favour at the coronation of William and Mary. Coronation souvenirs, as now, were of poor material and rather crude execution. A very simple series, yet of everlasting variety, were the wine measures of the 16th to 19th centuries. These were conceived of the leather bottle, and in succession are distinguished by the type of thumb-piece.

To one of simple tastes, as is the writer, nothing is more suitable to the metal, with the simple lines—stately, shapely, serviceable. What tales are traceable in these—for they often bear owners' initials and, very occasionally, the emblem of the inn itself. Such a one is illustrated. A Saracen's Head and T.D. The writer has sought the

records and found that Dunmow had a "Saracen's Head" at this time, and landlords named Dean—but the records cannot be persuaded to show one of the initial "T." How tantalising!

AVARICE

Another shows, cast in the base, a bull. This fine piece is of the time of Charles I. Yet another, underneath its base, bears a Rose and Crown. But this was not identified for many years, because the avaricious landlord had tapped up the soft metal base, thus mutilating the mark, to reduce the contents, when still filled to the brim. Perhaps he lost an ear for his efforts.



● A rack of spoons made between 1450–1650.

In the early 17th century pewter, as a base metal, was at last authorised for use in the Church, and in fact a fine display of Christian pewter was shown at Cringleford in May. This exhibition ranged from Roman British times to the 19th century, and had many unique national treasures on show. Church flagons, in which Norfolk churches are comparatively rich, are a fine and imposing series. Some can be seen in the photographs.

To talk of rare pieces is perhaps facile. They are very scarce indeed on the market and there are sometimes visible pitfalls. From the start of real interest in about 1920, through the 1930's, many very clever fakes were placed on the market—superb articles of perfidious craftsmanship—by no means easy to detect. Perhaps disappointingly, it is impossible to describe the tell-tale

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THE OPEN ROAD (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 50)

had been added by land reclaimed from the sea. In 1776 it passed to Thomas William Coke, M.P., and it was he who achieved renown as the great farmer, who by introducing many revolutionary ideas to farming made agriculture a prosperous business.

He kept open house in the great mansion, already filled with the fine art treasures collected by his ancestor the 1st Earl of Leicester, and farmers from all over this country and from abroad came to his famous "sheep-shearings" to study his methods. Not only did they learn how to increase production and make their land richer, but they also saw how the workers were housed and treated as partners in a great enterprise. Coke of Norfolk for long resisted any titles, but on the accession of Queen Victoria he relented and, for the sake of his family, became the 2nd Earl of Leicester. Norfolk and all England owe much to this great character, who had literally changed the face of the land, to give it new life.

Holkham and the Burnhams stand side by side, full of smiling beauty, and yet so different from each other, a charming corner of England's countryside, rich in history.

- Facing the little green and the cross of Burnham Overy are these quaint cottages. That on the left having an ostrich over the door is named, not uncuriously, Ostrich House.



COLLECTING PEWTER (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 37)

give-aways. Sometimes, of course, a piece is not entire, or is made up. Again, some pieces are made as honest reproductions—often sold ignorantly, or dishonestly, as genuine. Some pieces are of no true style, having "old" marks, and have recently been bashed about and coloured artificially. One such a piece was obvious to those knowledgeable in the subject, at an Antiques Fair in East Anglia this year. This was passed by the "experts" as genuine—but how can one expect the ordinary antique dealer to be really knowledgeable on all the multitudinous subjects in antiques. The amateur is out on his own and must be his own authority, unless he has friends in the know who can help him.

Pewter manufacture continued in the 18th century, with less control, and more competition—especially with the discovery of an additive enabling a far lighter, thinner and stronger alloy to supplant it largely. Britannia Metal started with the purest of lines, such as bullet tea-pots and cream jugs—but soon was subjected to the worst debasement of silver styles. It could be worked to complicated decoration similar to silver,



- A very rare—perhaps unique—flat lidded tankard made about 1690.

but its cheapness encouraged the gaudy grossness of debased styling. Britannia metal has so far been abhorred by collectors—so here is a field for the discerning eye—both in collecting and in research. Good specimens are rare, but it would be a very rewarding subject.

A LANDMARK

One can make a landmark of 1826, for Imperial standard was instituted, and a large range of pub tankards and measures are available. In the early 1930's it was enacted that public houses might not serve beer in pewter unless requested, and the majority was put on the market. Americans and Canadians took large quantities during the war—and, together with the Scandinavians, the Low Countries and Australia, have continued to buy all that can be found for them.

Curiously enough, we really know less about 19th century pewter than the previous two hundred years, simply because they were so common as to be unworthy of collectors. It is only recently that in pewter circles attention is really being paid to 19th century items—and here, too, is a big field, with the urgency of a dwindling supply to examine, for those keen on research. Collectors are of many types—and the investor, pure and simple(!) is looked down upon. The shrewd collector who sees, mentally compares, stores his information and collates it, like a detective, is the blessing to all. It is not necessary to possess to be expert—but it is necessary to handle, and handle, and handle. Discuss with the knowledgeable, collect discreetly, abhor too rapid purchase of the rarer items. Seek other collectors—collect modestly, carefully and progressively and use it as a means for research—there is untold interest in research, and the very fact of research enhances one's own possessions. At any level, the subject is fascinating and gives unending satisfaction, for possession, value and aestheticism.